

ARTSEDU 2012

## The tradition of exhibition and the effects of globalization in contemporary Turkish art

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### Abstract

In the 1990s, Turkish contemporary art ushered in a new period of time especially in terms of the tradition of exhibition. In Turkey, the 1990s, especially seen as the years where cultural dialogues started in a global sense, indicate a process in which outward oriented policies arose clearly. Art production in this period is synchronized with world art. In this period events including the biennial event, art fairs, increased international organizations and alternative, innovative art movements can be observed and it is possible to say that with the help of exhibitions realized by the curators the transition has been made to a new concept of display.

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**Keywords:** Exhibition, globalization, contemporary art, fine arts

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### 1. Introduction

From the period of the Ottoman Reform (Tanzimat) to the present time the tradition of exhibition has changed a lot, with the galleries seen on the historical stage in the 1970s entering the global process in the 1980s, the changed system which returned the wheels of art and culture that has become the part of the global network in the 1990s, the beginning of the biennial events in the late 1980s and the collectives and initiatives that began to emerge in the 2000s searching for self conceptions and an alternative space to exhibit.

In Turkish art the tradition of displaying which began to emerge in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has shown changes with the effects of various social, political and economic factors. As well as some national factors, there are some other factors causing these changes, like the effects of the globalization process that began to be felt more clearly especially in the 1990s. The globalization process has preserved its existence in all fields from economics to culture, and at the same time it has become a phenomenon shaping and giving a brand new impetus to art. In this period alongside the acceleration of globalization, the occurrence of a large, global, multinational and decentralized communication network was also bringing about a change in social structures, which also led to differences in the implementation and the perception of art. In Turkey, the 1990s, especially seen as the years of starting cultural dialogues in a global sense, indicate a process in which outward oriented policies arose clearly. Penetrating nearly all aspects of social life, the reflections of the cultural and artistic context of globalization have brought a new perspective to the tradition of exhibiting. In this period, events including the biennial event, increased international organizations, the denial of modernist style and alternative, innovative art movements can be observed, and it is possible to say that the transition was made to a new concept of display with the help of exhibitions realised by

domestic and international curators. Contemporary curators who realised exhibitions which contributed to periodic and global transitions were one of the most important carriers of this process.

## **2.The tradition of exhibition extending from the period of the Ottoman Reform to the period of the Republic**

When we look at the history of Turkish art, it can be said that in terms of the tradition of exhibiting, the first steps began with the efforts of the military schools in the field of art education. The period commenced with military schools then continued with the works of civilian schools. The first two exhibitions, the first in Cıragan Palace in 1845, and the other in 1849 at the School of Military were held in the reign of Abdülmecid (Cezar 1995, p. 125). However, the first real painting exhibition was held with the efforts of Şeker Ahmet Paşa in 1873 in İstanbul (Tansuğ, 2008, p.92). The first participation of the Ottoman Empire in international exhibitions was at the London exhibition in 1851. The first exhibition opened in Europe by Turkish artists was given in “Vienna” exhibition in 1918. After the Constitutional exhibitions such as the exhibition of Osmanlı Ressamlar Cemiyeti (Painters of the Ottoman Society) in 1909 and the Galatasaray exhibitions in 1916-1952, “Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltıraşlar Birliği” (The Association of Independent Painters and Sculptors) held its first exhibition in 1929 in the Republican period. The exhibitions of “İnkılap” which were launched in 1933 and lasted until 1936 worked on some issues of war and republic (Yasa Yaman, 1992, p.138). The exhibitions of d Group in 1933 were followed by the exhibitions of Devlet Resim ve Heykel (State Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions). The exhibitions of the Yeniler Grubu that worked on social realistic pictures and the exhibitions of Türk Ressamlar ve Heykeltıraşlar Birliği (The Association of Turkish Painters and Sculptors) and some competitive exhibitions were realized in this period.

## **3.The social, cultural and artistic stage in the 1990s in Turkey**

The 1990s are of great importance in terms of the globalization that showed itself clearly in every aspect of life. The aftermath of the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the changes that sprang up in the 1980s led to many transformations and changes both in Turkey and in the world.

### *3.1. Social and artistic view of Turkey in the 1980s.*

Globalization has emerged with the combination of political, social, cultural and economic factors (Giddens 2008:84). The phenomenon of globalization coming to the agenda after the 1970s became even more apparent during the years of the 1980s and 1990s with the emerging of political and economic changes. In Turkey in the 1990s, the government of Ozal was activated and a modest liberalization movement was implemented. The implications of globalization around the world began to be felt in those years in Turkey, too. It began to emerge in every area of life from economics to social sciences, from ecology to the fine arts. Outward oriented policies and free market practices were implemented during this period. During this period of time an artificial consumer culture began to emerge in Turkey (Akşin 2007: 190-180). After the repressive attitude of 1980, with the effects of developing liberalization policies, changes in consumption patterns and lifestyles have been observed. This freedom and mobility felt itself in the artistic environment, too (Madra, 1989; Çalıkoğlu, 2008: 8-9). The electronic revolution around the world, the Internet and satellite technologies transforming the world into a global village, the end of the experience of the socialist Soviet Union and American interventionism have been the events affecting the cultural, social and artistic environment (Koyuncu 2007: 88; Akşin 2007: 110-111). Though the fact that the 1980s were the years that the advent of individual contemporary artists spread, contemporary artists such as Erdağ Aksel, Gülsün Karamustafa, Füsun Onur, Cengiz Çekil, İpek Duben, Canan Beykal, Serhat Kiraz, Osman Dinç, Balkan Naci İslimyeli and Handan Börüteçene began to partake in exhibitions together. The exhibitions in this period included *Yeni Eğilimler*” (New Directions) (1977-87), *“Günümüz Sanatçıları”* (Contemporary Artists) (1980), *“Öncü Türk Sanatından Bir Kesit”* ( A Cross Section of Pioneer Turkish Art) (1984-89), and “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”

(1989-92). The first of the international İstanbul Biennials, which was called the “1<sup>st</sup> International Contemporary Art Exhibition” would play an important role in linking Turkey’s art world to the global art scene.

### 3.2. Factors affecting contemporary art practices in the 1990s: Globalization and technological developments

As a result of advances in technology, forms of artistic expressions and techniques varied. Various media such as video, DVD and projection have opened the door to the new artistic interpretations. The spread of computer use and computer graphics programs have shown effects on the various artistic practices. Along with globalization, concurrency was possible between the world art scene and contemporary Turkish art. In this environment supported by pluralism and postmodernism some exhibitions and art events were organized in collaboration with different disciplines and different techniques (Madra 1991: 47; Madra 1989: 60; Özayten 2008: 18-19). Works generally included drawings, conceptual photographs, photocopies, custom-built furniture and collected objects, a variety of industrial supplies and installations created by lighting and lights (Madra 2008: 33).

### 3.3. The new aspect of art: Contemporary art and exhibitions in the 1990s

The foundations of the art of the 1990s were laid in the second half of the eighties. In this process, innovative art movements and exhibitions began to be organized and the art scene met with the curating system and curators for the first time. During the 90s, Vasıf Kortun, Beral Madra and Ali Akay signed their names on curatorial practices. They problematized some issues in the exhibitions they realized, such as immigration/migration, identity/ otherness. In this period transitional arrangements for the venue, video and performance could be observed intensely (Erdemci 2008: 281-303; Çalıkoğlu 2008: 10-11). In the 1990s, collaborative, interactive, and socially engaged processes and projects, political activism and performances, temporary spatial site and event specific organisations and interventions, Internet and media bound practices can be seen. Sarkis’s installation at the 4th İstanbul Biennial entitled “Pilav ve Tartışma Yeri” (“Rice and Discussion Place”) and the “picnics” organised by the Oda Projesi (founded in 2000) in their neighbourhoods were examples of social gestures encouraging the public’s participation (Erdemci, 2008, p.274.).



Fig.1. Sarkis “Rice and Discussion Place”, 1995, installation



Fig.2. Gülsün Karamustafa, “Mystical Transport”, 1992, installation

In the 1990s, Turkish artists engaged in close dialogue with the West. They have engaged in some international large scale exhibitions in various parts of the world. They were invited to some important biennials such as Venice, Lyon, Sao Paulo, Sydney and Kwangju. In 1990, after many years Turkey participated in the Venice Biennale at the Italian Pavillion curated by Beral Madra. In this exhibition Kemal Önsoy and Mithat Şen attended with two works of art. Turkey attended the 45<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale curated by Beral Madra with the works of Erdağ Aksel, Serhat



Kiraz and Adem Genç. Exhibitions with the cooperation of foreign artists and curators proliferated in this period. In 1990, the exhibition “Minos Art Symposium”, curated by Dimitri Coromilas and by the assistant curator Beral Madra was held. The artists from Turkey were Handan Börüteçene and Serhat Kiraz. The artists who participated in the exhibition worked on ‘new Mediterranean identity’. In 1992 the exhibition “Sanat Texnh” which was curated by Beral Madra and Efi Strousa was held with the participation of Turkish and Greek artists. Turkish artists included Canan Beykal, Selim Birsell, Ayşe Erkmen, Serhat Kiraz, Füsun Onur and Osman Dinç. The exhibitions “Anı Bellek” (1992-93) were curated by Vasıf Kortun. The exhibition “Küreselleşme Devlet- Sefalet- Şiddet” (1995) was curated by Ali Akay and the artists Gülsün Karamustafa, Emre/Müşerref Zeytinoğlu, Bülent Şangar, Michael Morris and Hüseyin Alptekin participated.



Fig. 3. Masa Projesi, an exhibition by Masa Project      Fig.4. Ha Za Vu Zu, “My ass in the googlearth”, 2009, stamp on the grass.

In the 2000s, some initiatives and collectives began to exhibit in different venues and in alternative places. Among these initiatives and collectives, X-Urban Collective, MentalKlinik, Oda Projesi (Chamber Project), Masa Projesi (Table Project), Apartman Projesi (Apartment Project), Atıl Kunst, and KUTU (Box) Portable Art Venue, have had alternative, innovative and marginal exhibitions.



Fig.5. X-Urban Collective, “Confessions”, 2001



Fig.6. MentalKlinik, “Tagcloud”, 2008

### 3.4. Leading progress: Biennials and art fairs

International İstanbul Biennials based on a conceptual framework started in 1987 as part of the international İstanbul Festivals. While in the first and second Biennials a mixed model had been applied, in the third one a biennial model based on national representation was applied. Starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> International İstanbul Biennale, the pavilions were abandoned and the single-selected model was adopted. Though International İstanbul Biennales have reached the targets of announcing the names of Turkish artists around the world in a sense, they would not fulfil the expectations of reaching the wide popular sector. Although both art fairs and biennials address exhibitions of plastic arts, it is thought that a huge gap between them exists. While art fairs address a wider audience, biennials seems to be aimed at relatively high culture.

In Turkey, the first art fair was held in 1991 in İstanbul entitled “İstanbul Art Fair” and it remained as the first and only art fair until 2001. Fair exhibition organizations in Turkey have increased rapidly since the early 2000s. In 2001, a new exhibition named “Artİstanbul” was organized by the Art Galleries Association. In 2005, two separate exhibitions called “Artforum Ankara” and “Ankart” and in 2006 two new art fairs, one of which was “Artshow” and the other was “Contemporary İstanbul”, were organized in İstanbul.

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